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A Simple deception- How can we restore the meaning of Christmas?

We live in a culture that in many ways has obscured the meaning of Christmas. There are a myriad of things that compete for our attention around Christmas time, and the *simplicity* of our devotion to Christ can be quickly compromised.

What does Jesus want for you or from you this Christmas?

What do you want for Christmas?

What do I want for Christmas?

How have we drifted so far from Christmas' meaning?

2 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV) But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

- We got here by listening to and yielding to our culture and the many temptations we face.
- We got here by losing meaning and purpose.

The simple meaning

- Christmas is the fulfillment of years of prophecy that the Messiah would come.

Isaiah 7:14 (NIV) Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

- Christmas is about the coming of Christ, God with us,

John 1:14 (NIV) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- Christmas is about God bringing light to a dark world through Christ Jesus, to lead us back to relationship with our Heavenly Father.

John 8:12 (ESV) Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

- He came to bring peace on earth (whom His favor rests).

The simple purpose

Celebrations, known as Festivals in OT, were designed to remind God's people of the faithfulness of God and all He had done for them.

Exodus 23:15 (NIV) "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt. "No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

Christmas is intended to be a celebration of the birth of Jesus. The enemy doesn't mind Christmas as long as it does not accomplish our purpose, to remember and worship Christ.

- Parents, Grandparents, what is your goal for Christmas with your family?
- Is it to make everyone happy? Is it to make sure everyone gets what they want?
- Do the kiddos get so many gifts that they cannot even truly appreciate them?
- What will your current habits and lessons lead to? Contentment and gratitude or entitlement and consumerism?
- What is your motivation behind all of the stuff Christmas demands?

Here is the real danger:

Judges 2:10 (NIV) After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.

Christmas is an opportunity to pause and give thanks for the love, hope and joy found in Jesus our Savior. It's an opportunity to disciple your children and grandchildren, building a spiritual legacy for them.

A simple celebration

Advent means "arrival" or "coming" and signifies the start of an event or the arrival of a person.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 (NIV) "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. 15 "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior."

Advent refers to a four-week season of remembering and celebrating the arrival of Jesus on Earth. The Advent Season is all about reflecting on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for Christ's birth.

Ideas to simplify and redirect your Christmas celebration:

- Use an advent calendar with your family leading up to Christmas.
- Have a nativity scene for your children to set up during December.
- Read the Christmas story in Luke 1 & 2.
- Talk about why Jesus came to earth with your family. What was His purpose?
- Minimize or eliminate Santa Clause - instead explain who St. Nicholas was and what He did.
- Invite unchurched friends to a Christmas Eve service and discuss what you heard with them.
- Adopt a family for Christmas to serve and bless them.
- Serve your family by doing something special for each family member. This is a gift.
- Minimize the number of gifts, stop asking kids what they want.
- Do a family devotion with your children on Christmas Eve or Christmas day.
- Baking favorite food or cookies to express love, bake Jesus a birthday cake.

Remember, gifts are an expression of appreciation that remind each other of the ultimate gift we have in Jesus.

Making changes may be painful at first. Start with a 2-3 year transitional plan if you find your family off the real purpose - remember, ultimately we are to prepare our children to be adults.

Apply:

Start by praying for God to give you wisdom and creativity as you plan your Christmas.

Stop and evaluate the opportunities you have to be purposeful this Christmas.

What are some simple adjustments to begin redirecting your celebration back on Jesus?

How will you communicate changes that help others know the why behind your ideas?

For Small Group Discussion

Questions: What was your favorite Christmas tradition growing up? What is the goal of your Christmas celebrations, & why?

Main Point: A simple Christmas is an intentional Christmas. It's a challenge to wade through the deceptions and distractions that take away from the true meaning of Christmas.

Main Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:3

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